The Comanches

291 After the acquisition of bandannas, the man wore one around his neck. Instead of tying it in front, he used a button made from buffalo bone through which he pulled the ends of the handkerchief. The older men still wear bandannas in this manner.

294 There was a time when the art of sewing was unknown and when garments were tied together at the seams, but in modern times clothing was neatly sewed with sinew thread, which was very stout and durable. Such thread was made from the sinew lying along either side of the spine of the buffalo or deer. It was taken off in long pieces and dried, and strands of it were split off with the finger nails as needed. The strand of thread was then moistened in the mouth and rolled on the knee with the palm of the hand or between the palms, and one end of the thread pointed. With an awl a hole was made in the material, the fine point of the thread was passed through the hole, and the thread pulled through with the fingers.

294 Awls and needles were usually made of bone sharpened to a fine point. Steel substitutes were among the first articles traded by the whites to the Indians, but the methods of sewing remained practically unchanged so long as leather was used for clothing. Sewing implements were carried in a small case made of dressed buffalo cow or calfskin tied to the belt. Such cases usually opened at the top with a flap. The awl was also carried by the men as a part of their everyday outfit, since it was an essential tool in their work. The men carried it in a small leather pouch with a flap covering, attached to the wrist by a buckskin thong. Pouches were ornamented with variously colored beads in simple design and sometimes fringed with metal pendants.

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291 The buffalo robe was a regular part of the wardrobe. Hides for robes were taken during the fall months of November and December. Some robes were prepared with the hair left on for use in extremely cold weather, while others were prepared with the hair removed for milder weather. Some specimens retained the holes around the edge through which pegs were driven in stretching the hide. Minor alterations in shape were made by cutting off the tail and legs and by tucking the ears through slits from the outer to the under side. The Comanche robe was usually made of two separate pieces sewed together down the center, because the buffalo was skinned by cutting

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281 was thrown across a limb, laced to upright saplings (called a rack), thrown across a log flattened on top, or more often stretched upon the ground with flesh side up. If stretched upon the ground, it was made fast by means of wooden pins driven into the earth through small cuts in the edge of the hide. To get the best results in tanning, it was important that before the hide dried, it should be evenly fleshed, by which is meant freeing it of every particle of blood, fat, and flesh. This was necessary for rapid drying as well as to reduce the hide to a uniform and proper thickness.

281 Fleshing tools varied from a sharp flint flake or buffalo bone to
H13 an instrument similar to a drawing knife. Sometimes a wooden hoe made from the fork of a limb of a tree with the cutting part sharpened and finely serrated was employed. The most commonly used instrument was shaped somewhat like an adze. The cutting edge of this tool was bound to a handle of elk horn with strings of rawhide or sinew. It could be used with one hand. With the appearance of the white man the flint cutting edge gave way to metal blades. The rough, abrasive surface of the dried skin of buffalo tongue was preferred in some bands. As the skin clothing and the skin lodges were made by the women, the fleshing implements were very important and were handed down from one generation to another.

281 With the fleshing tool the worker clipped the skin, cutting off a thin shaving with each blow. The skill of this process lay in so directing and tempering the blows as to cut off the skin and yet not hack through it, and in finally obtaining a perfectly smooth inner surface of uniform thickness. Moistened wood ashes were spread on the fatty, greasy surface from time to time and left long enough for the lye to neutralize the fat. This process completed, the hide was usually left to cure and bleach in the sun for several days, although it might be saturated occasionally in water.

The next step was to make the skin soft and pliable, for if given no further treatment, it became hard and inflexible. One satisfactory method was to place it in a hole in the ground, cover it with water and then tramp it for one or two hours. Most women used a tanning mixture composed of brains, liver, grease, basswood bark, soapweed, and water. The basswood bark or soapweed root was pounded fine and thoroughly mixed with the buffalo or deer brains or liver. Grease